



AMATEUR PLAYERS OF SHERBORNE

Newsletter

OCTOBER
1996



Dear Member,

Now that the 1996-97 season is under way, the time has come to bring you up to date with what is happening. The season has started well and there is much to look forward to in between now and next June.

The opening night was very well attended--some 40 people turned up and very much enjoyed the sumptuous food prepared by Jakki Gregory. She and Tony had organised, by way of entertainment, a quiz, for which the assembled company divided into two large teams. However, the second half of the quiz was abandoned as most people seemed content to chat and catch up with the news from people they hadn't seen all summer!

On September 25th Marilyn Hawkins gave us another 'American Sampler'. On this occasion the first half consisted of seven evocative American poems whose thread was "the spirit of a large and growing country, struggling to grow up and find itself". The second half of the evening was a rehearsed reading of a condensed version of *Our Town*, Thornton Wilder's classic piece about the lives of the inhabitants of a small American town. In this Marilyn was ably assisted by Lance Salway, Gill Manns, Tony Manns and Patricia Stewart and the results were much appreciated by the 30 members who came.

On October 18th Jessica Colson was to have presented a rehearsed play reading. However, despite her best endeavours she had not been able to find anyone able to help her, so instead we had a most enjoyable unrehearsed reading of *The Secretary Bird*, a most amusing play about one man's success in preventing his wife from running off with another by behaving outrageously. The play was familiar to some of those present, as *The Players* produced it in the spring of 1984. Over 20 members turned up for this and everyone had a chance to read.



I am delighted to be able to report that in this Autumn's production of Trelawny of the "Wells" our President, Joy Saunders, is making a welcome return to the boards--having last appeared on stage seven years ago in the 1989 production of A Murder is Announced.

*For those of you who do not already know, Joy is the daughter of Fred B. Alcock, the man who in the late 1920s took the first steps that led to the founding of the players in 1934. Fred's skill as an actor and director, together with his ability to get actors, technicians and other helpers to do what he wanted (he was not a committee man!) got *The Players* off to a flying start, and the momentum he generated continued up to and throughout World War II. Fred left Sherborne in 1947 to continue his career in banking elsewhere, but he maintained contact with *The Players* for many years. Joy married in 1948 and returned to Sherborne, where she has lived ever since.*

*This photograph shows Joy with her father in the 1946 production of *Dear Brutus*, which was first presented in the Digby Road Church Hall and then at the Bristol Guild of Players' Full-length Play Festival at the Theatre Royal in Bristol, where it won the Bristol Guild of Players Shield.*

*The story of this and other events in the early history of *The Players* can be found in Fred's book *As it Was*, from which this photograph is taken. There are still a number of copies of this book around--recommended reading for an insight into the man himself and the origins and early history of the Amateur Players of Sherborne.*



At the time of writing we have a membership of 76, including 11 new members. A few of you reading this letter will perhaps fondly imagine that you are included in this number but on examining the list of members on the next page will find, to your horror, that you are not. The reason for this is that you have not yet paid your sub. The Treasurer or the Membership Secretary will be pleased to accept your contribution (a cheque in the post is quite acceptable), at which

What's On

Thur 8th, Fri 9th, Sat 10th November
Sturminster Hall, 7.30 p.m.

SNADS present *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of 'A Christmas Carol'*.

[When I saw the BADS production of this play I laughed so much I cried. M.L.]

Artsreach Productions

Hijinx Theatre, *The Dove Maiden*
Shillingstone, 24th Oct
Thorncombe, 26th Oct

Told By and Idiot, *You Haven't Embraced Me Yet*
Shillingstone, 22nd Nov

Knechigh Theatre, *Telling Tales*
Thorncombe, 4th Dec

THE DIRECTORS

This month's contribution comes from Geoff Lewis. Geoff is a very experienced director, who has been involved in Amateur Theatre for as long as he cares to remember. He has worked with a number of different companies, and being himself an accomplished actor, he has a keen understanding of the needs of the actors he is directing. In recent years he has directed a number of productions for BADS (Buckland Newton Amateur Dramatic Society, as well as the acclaimed 1991 production of Murder in The Cathedral in Sherborne and last year's APS production of She Stoops to Conquer.

Some Thoughts on Directing

There are so many strands to directing that in a short space I can only tug quickly at those I feel are personally most important. The following is not intended to be viewed in absolute terms, as all directors adopt their own methods. Much depends on individual preference and how comfortable a director feels in trying to obtain the best results.

At the top of any list should be the text and fidelity to it. Read the script over and over again until you are fully alert to all its possibilities. You should aim to know the play better than any of the actors so that you can be ready to explain, define and interpret. Look for the play's sub-texts, undercurrents, nuances and, of course, read hard into the hearts of the characters. The actor and director can make a series of adjustments and the actor will, and probably should, come out on top. Discussions should take place on how a character behaves, talks and responds, and about his or her role in the general action. Look for the author's intention. Forget preconceived notions about the play and remain true to your vision. Apply your "creative imagination" to the script (Stanislavsky) and discard the strait jacket of the direction-filled

'French's Acting Edition'. Make your mind a blank canvas and paint your own picture. It is your production -- not a replica of a West End show. Your company, for one thing, has different demands and considerations from those of other companies. I am at my happiest when presented with a text that has nothing but dialogue and settings in it. The most important thing to a director is the 'mind's eye' and, using this, weeks, if not months, should be set aside for working on the script prior to the first rehearsal.

Casting is of the utmost importance. Your task is made that much easier by good casting. The smaller the cast, the greater the importance.

Rehearsals should be notified well in advance through a rehearsal schedule. Try to plan the correct number of rehearsals (very difficult) and be prepared to make adjustments for absences of key members of the cast. Rehearse all parts of the play equally and consider (tactfully -- remember the business and domestic demands of people's lives) extra rehearsals if required.

Blocking can be tedious but is nevertheless important. Get your actors' moves right and you will have a flowing, seamless and vital production. In addition, your actors will usually appreciate knowing where they are supposed to be on stage.

A reliable **technical team** will help reduce the inevitable headaches that increase as the production week draws near. Lighting, sound, wardrobe, prompt are all vital areas to consider, but your most cherished friend in the turmoil ahead will be your stage manager, so recruit with care. Let each member of the team know clearly and precisely what it is you require and prepare plots and diagrams for their use.

Lighting and sound should be carefully considered. They are integral to any production and can add so much to the mood and flow.

Remember, too, that as Director you are the audience right up to the first night. See

the play as a whole, be aware of the (probably countless) problems, and try to see the play as if it were for the first time. Encourage discussion and suggestions. Be grateful for those used and diplomatic when rejecting those not used. Give constructive notes after rehearsal and if a character is not developing as you think it should, speak to the actor concerned privately afterwards.

Above all, be enthusiastic and relaxed, even if you don't feel it. It all helps to relieve tensions and anxieties.

Yes, I know I have omitted a million and one important aspects of directing, but pressure of space dictates. Writing an article of this kind all about selection and rejection. I have not attempted to be comprehensive, only to provide a simple guide which I hope may be as helpful to others as it is to me when I embark on that long voyage to the land of performance. I always try to put my principles into practice but I don't always succeed. Putting on a play is a learning process that can be at once immensely pleasurable and somewhat painful. You will achieve much if you can let the pleasure be the dominant factor -- it's your baby, let it thrive.

I will conclude by quoting a couple of passages from Robert Stephens' book, *Knight Errant*. He is a marvellous actor who has worked with all the best actors and directors and so I value his insights.

"The experience of *Saint Joan* (1955) convinced me that the best company of actors is the happiest company of actors, bound in a common purpose with democratic, shared objectives...."

And (on the 'genius' class of director) "I can't explain it, because I don't know where the magic comes from. It is something to do with imagination, tenacity, bullying, examination of how best to help an actor. A good director works ten times as hard as anyone else on the production."

point you will of course receive one of this year's highly sought after yellow membership cards. If, of course your name is not on the list and you know that you have paid your sub, please do let me know--we all make mistakes! For those who do not pay a subscription, I'm afraid this is the last Newsletter you will receive.

One of the decisions made at the AGM earlier this year was not to increase subscriptions, but instead to make a charge of 50p for those attending members evenings. Some members have since voiced some concern and criticism over this decision, pointing out that for those who regularly attend members evenings the increased cost will be greater than than a modest increase in subscription would have been. There are arguments for and against this charge and some, at least, of these were aired at the AGM. However the Committee are agreed that we cannot now reverse what was a majority decision of those present at the AGM. And in any case the increase is not as great as some people have suggested, as the 50p includes the charge for coffee, for which members have always been asked to contribute 20p anyway. In view of the complaints the committee intends to monitor the situation through the year. If enough members feel strongly that the decision was the wrong one, it can always be reversed at next year's AGM!

Rehearsals for *Trelawny of the Wells* are going well. A list of cast members is given here. **Jen Harvey-Hull** is directing and on this occasion she has **Jessica Colson** as Producer to assist her. Stage Manager and Set Designer is **Jim Schofield**, who is would like some help beforehand to paint and wallpaper flats for the set--volunteers please telephone Jim on 01935-812051. Setting up will begin on the morning of Saturday 23rd November and for that, as usual, we need a number of willing bodies to help move the flats etc from the Castle Stables to the Digby Hall and then to construct the sets. Contact Jim if you can come, but if you cannot decide until the last moment we will be delighted to see you anyway. Front of House Manager on this occasion is **Tony Field**, so volunteers to help FOH please contact him on 01935-815427.

Tickets will be on sale from November 11th, via Tony. Jennie has asked me to point out that if every member could make themselves responsible for selling 10 tickets we would be sold out. Ultimately, the success or failure of any production rests on ticket sales, so please could all members do their best to sell as many tickets as possible.

M.L.

Trelawny of the "Wells"

Mrs Mossop	GILL MANNS
Ablett	TONY MANNS
Tom Wrench	DAVID BOWEN
Imogen Parrott	KATHY MESSINGER
Telfer	DAVID SMITH
Ferdinand Gadd	MARK LAMBERT
Augustus Colpoys	STUART McCREADIE
Avonia Bunn	STEPHANIE GREEN
Rose Trelawny	HOLLY BURBAGE
Arthur Gower	ANDREW HELSON
Mrs Telfer	FIZZ LEWIS
Sarah	REBECCA HILL
Clara de Foenix	NATALIE COX
Captain de Foenix	KIERAN MILLAR
Sir William Gower	VIVIAN VALE
Miss Trafalgar Gower	JOY SAUNDERS
Charles	JACK TUCKER
O'Dwyer	COLIN MAYES
Mr Hunston	ADAM BIRKS-HAY
Mr Denzil	SIMON MANATON
Miss Brewster	SALLY CHAPMAN
Hall Keeper	JIM SCHOFIELD

Prompt Corner

Dates for your diaries

Friday 8th November
Music and Comedy
 presented by
 Jakki Gregory
 Cheap St Church Hall, 7.30 p.m.

Saturday 23rd November, a.m.
'Setting up' in the Digby Hall
 for *Trelawny of the "Wells"*.
 PLEASE COME AND HELP!

Thur 28th, Fri 29th, Sat 30th November
Trelawny of The "Wells"
 Performances. Digby Hall. 7.30 p.m.
 PLEASE COME!

Sunday 1st December, a.m.
Strike set from Digby Hall
 PLEASE!

Tuesday 10th December
 Christmas party with entertainment entitled
"...But Once A Year...." provided by
 Vivian Vale. Age Concern Hall 7.30 p.m.

Membership 1996-97 (paid-up at 19 Oct 1996)

Life Members	Sue Francis	Wendy Parris
Queenie Coles	Pauline Gardner	Deryck Parris
Ja Oodge	Stephanie Green	Monica Parsons
Meg Hulme	Jakki Gregory	Dod Pearson
Mary Micklewright	Tony Gregory	Michael Quinn
Margery Morgan	Freda Hance	Ann Russell
Gerald Pitman	Jennie Harvey-Hull	Lance Salway
Pam Richardson	Patricia Harris	Bob Service
Joy Saunders	Peter Hawkins	Jill Service
	Marilyn Hawkins	David Smith
Annual Members	Andrew Helson	Sylvia Smith
Graham Baker	Jill Hudson	Eve Snell
Barbara Beak	Lesley Jackson	Joan Snelling
Adam Birks-Hay	Christina Jane	Anthony Stephens
Lesley Birks-Hay	Louise Lambert	Mytyl Stephens
Tony Birks-Hay	Madeline Lambert	Deirdre Stewart
David Bowen	Mark Lambert	Patricia Stewart
Jenny Bunker	Tamsin Lambert	John Sutherland
Holly Burbage	Fizz Lewis	Hrolf Trump
Sally Chapman	Daisy Mangnall	Iris Trump
Charles Collis	Gill Manns	Jack Tucker
Isobel Collis	Tony Manns	Vivian Vale
Jessica Colson	Colin Mayes	Anthea Watson
Natalie Cox	Stuart McCreddie	Arthur Whittaker
Margaret Field	Kathy Messinger	Meg Whittingdale
Tony Field	Kieran Millar	
Suzanne Ford	Joan Miller	

LOST PROPERTY FOUND

A pair of lady's spectacles was found on a table in the Age Concern Hall at the end of the opening night. The frame is a clear, pinkish colour. Would the owner please telephone me on 01258-817270. M.L.